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# Behind Gershwin's Eyes

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the blaze with a forked  
madrone branch. Soon there  
is fire between us  
again and more heat  
than we can bear.  
Our shadowy pattern  
flickers on the peeling  
wall. My body fills  
with warmth where it is  
touched by the glowing  
of your fires.

## BEHIND GERSHWIN'S EYES

*Nobody else smelled burning garbage because  
Gershwin's olfactory sensation came from a  
slow-growing tumor on the right temporal  
lobe of his brain.*

—Joan Peyser, *The Memory of All That*

They did not believe him.  
They told him the smell  
of burning garbage was all  
in his head. Some mornings  
it was all he could do  
to lift his head from  
the pillow. Some nights  
his brain was on fire,  
songs he thought would take  
a hundred years to write  
suddenly aflame behind  
his bulging eyes.

Dizzy in the barber's  
chair, dizzy before  
the chorus, dizzy  
on the tennis court.

They did not believe him  
even when he was adrift  
in the first movement  
of his Concerto in F.  
He felt darkness beyond  
the footlights seep  
into his soul, nothing  
but a sea of dream  
everywhere, and heard  
the echo of unplucked  
strings, a quiver  
of timpani dying out  
quickly as one long  
note from an oboe  
wafted heavenward.  
Then he found himself  
back in Los Angeles,  
familiar body still  
upright on the piano stool,  
Smallens with his baton  
frozen at the shoulder,  
only to blunder again  
in the andante and they  
told him nothing was wrong.

Dizzy in the Brown  
Derby, dizzy before  
the surf, dizzy  
in the swimming pool.

They believed he was  
not happy in Hollywood.  
*There is nothing wrong  
with Gershwin that a song  
hit wouldn't cure.*  
It was in his head, he was  
lovelorn or he was riddled

with guilt, he was balding  
and drooling, muddle-headed  
by noon, listless underneath  
the stars. They believed  
him sapped by motion picture  
making and longing for New  
York City. Those hands  
once a blur on the keyboard  
could only move slow as flowers  
toward the sun yet nothing  
was wrong. In the spring  
those sandaled feet  
that could only shuffle  
in the summer garden  
had been quick as flame  
to his own new music  
yet nothing was wrong.

A blade of light  
where the drawn shades  
meet. Roses without odor,  
icewater leaping from its cut  
glass goblet, eyes leached  
of luster in the shadowy  
mirror of his brother's eyes.  
He spread chocolates melted  
in the oven of his palm  
up his arms like an ointment,  
and soon he was gone.